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*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3. (Spring, 1964), pp. 31-40.

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*Film Quarterly* is currently published by University of California Press.

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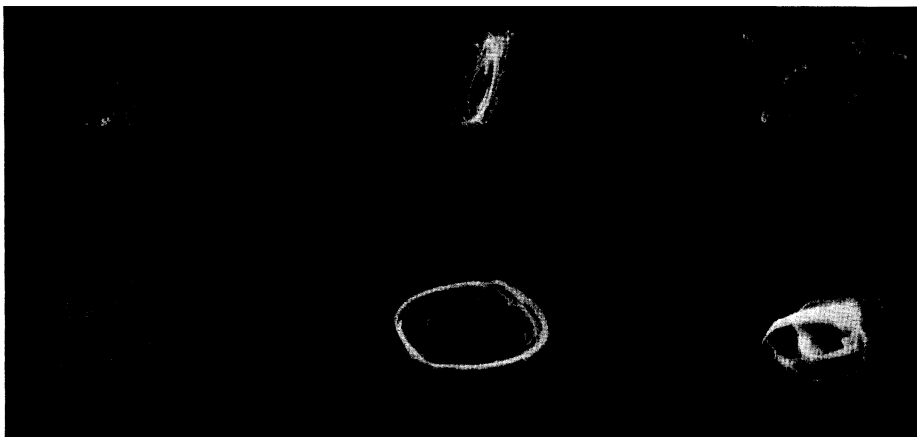
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*Images produced by Risdon  
with his electronic system.*

extraordinary images can be seen elsewhere. However, he thinks of the experiences as theatrical in the large sense—indeed some of his pieces are “performed”: varied and structured in the playing. Understandably, perhaps, he does not seem anxious to can them for ordinary distribution.

After *Allures*, or an evening of Risdon’s electronic images, one comes away feeling

that action-painting, pop art, and the other clichés with which painters have been concerning themselves, are quaint artifacts of an age before we were born—pleasant in their homey way, like a kerosene lamp, but no longer relevant. What Antonioni is to the dramatic narrative film, these weird, unsettling images are to the abstract film. Their influence will spread far through the animated films of the future.

**HARRIET R. POLT**

## The Czechoslovak Animated Film

*During the summer of 1963, Miss Polt, who was born in Czechoslovakia, paid an extended visit to Czechoslovak animation studios; this formed the basis of the following study of a notable national tradition in the genre.*

Czechoslovak animated films have won numerous festival prizes and have long been recognized, especially in Europe, as among the world’s outstanding examples of this neglected form of the film art. The films made during the last several years point to further development and will be discussed at some length

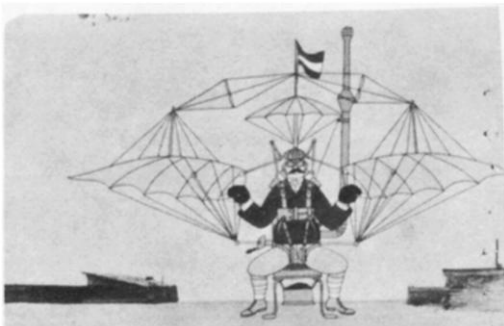
later in this article. It is helpful first, however, to give a few definitions and a brief summary of Czech animated films from 1945 until the late ‘fifties.

In the United States, the word “animation” is traditionally used to refer only to *drawn* animation and is virtually synonymous with “cartoon.” In Europe,

the terminology is different and a word of explanation is in order. The French term *cinéma d'animation* includes not only drawn animation, but also puppet and object animation, as well as the animation of photographs (here called photo-animation) and paintings, and various other techniques of film-making such as painting designs directly on the film (as in Norman McLaren's work). The term, in other words, covers everything that is *not* live action.<sup>1</sup> In German and in Czech, the term "animation" in our sense does not exist at all. Instead, all of the categories of films included in the French term *cinéma d'animation* are covered by the words *trick film*. In this article we shall therefore consider not only drawn animation but also puppet, silhouette, painting, and photo-animation.

The Czechs were making cartoons as early as the '20's; however the real development of the industry did not begin until just after World War II. At this time the "Trick Brothers" studio, whose symbol, three little men in striped jerseys, was to mark the opening of many noteworthy cartoons, was developed by a small group of animators who had been making advertising cartoons during the war. Jiri Trnka was put in charge of the studio. In the first two years of the Trick Brothers period, before he went over to the Puppet Film Studio, Trnka made a number of cartoons—*Grandfather Plants a Beet*, *The Animals and the Brigands*, *The Gift*, and *Springheeled Jack*. Of these cartoons, *The Gift* is particularly significant for the modernity and stylization of its design—the figures' legs ending not in feet but in points, the waving hair of the artist—as well as for the subtlety of its story line. *The Gift* has as its characters people instead of animals (for a change), and its situation is, while fantastic, not grotesque. It is, according to J.-P. Coursodon, "somewhat the *Citizen Kane* of animation."<sup>2</sup> *Springheeled Jack* (1946) was one of the first cartoons to use a background consisting of actual photographs (scenes of Prague streets, in this case), against which the rounded, ghostlike figure of the hero and those of angular goose-stepping SS-men are particularly effective.

Other important early cartoons were *Atom at the Crossroads* by Cenek Duba, *The Angel's Coat* directed by Eduard Hofman and written by Jiri Brdecka's



Brdecka's *HOW MAN LEARNED TO FLY*.

ka, *Dirigible and Love* with script and direction by Brdecka; and *The Millionaire Who Stole the Sun*, by Zdenek Miler in an unusual "sketched" style.

The early '50's, a time of political oppression and artistic sterility in Czechoslovakia, produced few cartoons of value; the next productive period began around 1957 with such films as Zdenek Miler's *How the Mole Got His Trousers*; and *Moontale*, especially noteworthy for its clever use of collage materials—spangles, cut-outs, etc. Jiri Brdecka produced two good pictures also: *Before Man Learned to Fly*, a half-comic, half-serious film using old newsreels and animated engravings; and *Attention!* with designs by Zdenek Seydl. Brdecka collaborated with Bretislav Pojar on *Bomb-Mania*, for which Trnka did the designing. *The Creation of the World* by Eduard Hofman is a full-length comic version of Genesis (though acclaimed at Venice, the film was damned by the Vatican). In Frantisek Vystrelil's *A Place in the Sun* we find a line-drawing cartoon, somewhat reminiscent of early UPA style, satirizing two men's greed for a little spot of sunshine.

Perhaps better known are the Czech puppet films of the period 1945-1960. The Czechoslovak puppet film derives from a long tradition of puppet theater, reaching back as far as the 18th century. Jiri Trnka, best-known of the puppet-film-makers, himself worked with the famous Czech puppeteer Josef Skupa before the war. In explanation of the Czech interest in puppets, Trnka has said: "The Czech artists have always looked for the world's reality not in size but rather in depth, not on the high mountains, but in the

<sup>1</sup>Another French term is the *film image-par-image*—implying the technique of frame-by-frame exposure. This would leave out a film of hand puppets in action, for example, and also McLaren's works drawn directly on film without usual frame boundaries or separate exposures, as well as the new electronic techniques.

<sup>2</sup>J.-P. Coursodon, "Jiri Trnka: Cinéaste par Excellence," *Cinéma* 60, no. 44, 1960, p. 100.

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woods, the rivers, in the songs of birds and of young girls, in the sorrows and joys of children—it is in these places also that we find reality. Perhaps it is for this reason that we love puppets, because in this smallest of worlds we attempt to express everything about life, about beauty and about love . . .”<sup>3</sup> Robert Benayoun puts it less poetically: “Among the Czechs, stylization is not a moralizing postulate, but rather a matter of natural selection. Czechoslovakia is the cradle of European marionettes.”<sup>4</sup>

Three big names stand out in the Czech puppet film from 1945 to the present. First there is Trnka. Not less important is Karel Zeman, and coming into his own somewhat later is Bretislav Pojar.

Trnka's first puppet film, made in 1947, was *The Czech Year* (*Spalicek*), a full-length film consisting of six episodes illustrating old customs, sayings, and folksongs of the Czechoslovak people. The film has a scope and a maturity no animator had previously attempted. The puppets are highly stylized, with round heads and huge eyes. Their movements approximate, without trying to imitate, those of “real” people and achieve for the film a lyrical rhythm quite new to animation. The music for *The Czech Year*, composed, as in many of Trnka's later films, by Vaclav Trojan, is one of the most appealing parts of the film. Unfortunately the existing prints, like those of many Czech films of this period, are badly faded: they were made in Agfacolor, which in time has become dull and brownish.

Trnka produced at least one film every year between 1947 and 1950, of which, for lack of space, I shall mention only two. *The Song of the Prairie* was a parody of a Western, with excellent music by Jan Rychlik—and with one puppet exactly resembling Trnka himself, of which Trnka said, “This is my contribution to Socialist Realism.” In *Bajaja*, a full-length romantic fairy-tale, the puppets assume much more personality than those of *The Czech Year*. Trnka followed with *Old Czech Legends* in 1953, again with music by Trojan. In this film, the puppets take on a statuesque quality entirely divorced from the caricaturistic type common to most animated films. Several episodes from the modern Czech classic

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in *Paris-Prague*, no. 11-12, December, 1961, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Benayoun, *Le Dessin Animé après Walt Disney*, p. 15. What Benayoun seems to mean is that stylization is a competitive tradition with the Czechoslovaks, rather than a purposefully assumed manner of saying or showing something.



*The big three of Czechoslovak animation: top, Trnka and Pojar; bottom, Zeman.*

*The Good Soldier Schweik* appeared in 1954-1955. Here, for the first time, Trnka let his puppets speak: in previous films he had relied solely on music or on a spoken commentary. In 1959, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Trnka returned to the spoken commentary. In this highly decorative version of the Shakespeare play (with music again by Trojan), Trnka uses puppets of all sorts, from the simplistic, round-headed, bulb-nosed figures of the artisans (similar to the puppets of *The Czech Year*) to the dignified, life-like figure of Theseus. Speech is indeed not necessary: the movements of the puppets take the place of speech, and the commentary is fully adequate to inform us of what is going on.

Karel Zeman's career is more varied than that of Trnka. His *Christmas Dream* in 1946 was the first

puppet film to be made at the newly established puppet film studio. This film was followed by a series featuring Mr. Prokoup, a mustachioed little man, the personification of middle-class mediocrity. In 1947 came *Inspiration*, a tour de force in which Zeman animated glass figurines. Though this film's fancy seems a bit dated now, one can't help admiring its technical virtuosity: for each frame, each figurine had to be heated and re-shaped. The last of Zeman's more important conventional puppet films was *The Treasure of Bird Island*, a dramatization of a Persian fairy-tale. Here, Zeman innovated by combining puppets with drawn animation.

With *A Journey into Prehistoric Times* in 1955, Zeman began the series of fantastic half-live, half-animated films for which he is best known here. Combining puppets, large mock-ups, and photographs with live action, Zeman achieved results of a much higher artistic value than those of the average science-fiction or monster film. The startling quality of Zeman's films is due not to their plaster monsters but to their technique—the image is that of the storybook illustration come to life. Zeman perfected his method in *The Diabolical Invention* (sometimes called *An Invention of Destruction* or *The Deadly Invention*). In this film, based on a story by Jules Verne, Zeman was inspired by the drawings of Gustave Doré, which he animated into the film, again combining them with live-action, of course, puppets, and various ingenious trick techniques. The striated effect of the animated engravings is carried out in the costumes of the actors, thus eliminating the sense of "real" characters in "fake" settings. Reinold E. Thiel refers to the "alienation techniques" (*Verfremdungseffekte*) with which Zeman presents contemporary problems in antique guise (*The Diabolical Invention* deals with a terribly powerful explosive which falls into the hands of pirates).<sup>5</sup> *Baron Munchhausen*, made in 1959, made use of the same techniques but with the added complication of color. Shot in black and white, the film was later colored in the laboratory, not in a realistic but rather in an impressionistic way, the mood of each scene being set by one predominating color.

Bretislav Pojar, youngest of the big three, worked for many years with Trnka before going on his own as a director of puppet films. From 1945 to 1947 he worked in Trnka's studio as an animator. For the next ten years he continued to collaborate with Trnka, though he began directing himself (*Hansel and Gretel*) as early as 1951. Pojar animated indi-

vidual puppets in such Trnka films as *The Czech Year*, *The Emperor's Nightingale*, *Bajaja*, *Old Czech Legends*, and others.

Though Pojar's career as a director began in 1951, it was 1954 before he made his next film, *A Drop Too Much*, the story of a motorcyclist whose overindulgence brings him to an unhappy end. Then came a series of pictures with Spejbl and Hurvinek, traditional puppet figures beloved by Czech theater audiences. Pojar's first major film, which won him the Grand Prize at the Annecy animation festival, was *The Lion and the Song* (1959). In this picture, a hungry lion devours a wandering harlequin and his accordion and goes through the desert with music coming from his insides until his death; after which another wanderer picks up the accordion from the lion's skeleton and continues along in the desert. The puppets for this film, like the puppets and designs for many other films by Pojar and Trnka, were made by Zdenek Seydl. The lion, though comic at times, manages to be ferocious also—one of the few figures in animation that does.

Of the remaining directors of puppet films—about 12 in all—the most important is Hermína Tyrlova, who made her first film, *Ferdinand the Ant*, in 1941. Since then she has made many children's puppet films, which we will not deal with in the present article. Others worthy of mention are Jan Karpas, Stanislav Latal, and Josef Kluge, a disciple of Pojar's.

Before discussing new films and current projects of specific directors, it would be helpful to give a general view of the animation industry in Czechoslovakia. The average yearly output is 8 drawn and 11 puppet films. These are produced in several studios in Prague and Gottwaldov—Kreslený Film studio (animation) and Loutkový Film (puppets) with branches headed by Trnka and by Pojar, all in Prague, and the studios in the city of Gottwaldov in Moravia, where Zeman and Tyrlova work.

The setup of the animation studios is somewhat different from that common in the United States, in that a group of 20 to 40 people works for all the directors; that is to say, no one director has his own personal group of animators.

Czech animation artists are required to complete a five-year course at the Prague School of Fine Arts. Since the schools and colleges in Czechoslovakia are responsible not only for the education but also for the future employment of their students, they admit only as many students as will foreseeably be able to get jobs upon graduation. Admission to the animation

<sup>5</sup>Reinold E. Thiel, *Puppe und Zeichenfilm*, p. 21.

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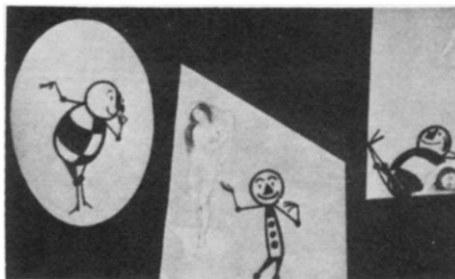
school is by examination, and places in the department are hotly competed for, only about 20 students being admitted per year. Of these, 5 to 15 may be expected to finish the course, and these graduates are guaranteed employment in one of the studios. Thus, unlike their Hollywood counterparts, Czech animators never find themselves unemployed. Guaranteed employment, however, has built-in drawbacks: since the studios have to be kept busy at all times, they are sometimes forced to occupy themselves with mediocre films just in order to keep their crews working.

One director who has made his reputation fairly recently is Vladimir Lehky. Lehky likes to use a very simple style of drawing, imitating in at least two of his films (*Three Men Fishing* and *Zuzanka Learns to Write*) the style and coloring of children's drawings. In *The Parasite* (1961) he uses a somewhat more sophisticated but equally simple form of stick-figures. Here, Lehky innovates in projecting the story of each of his two main characters on a different screen, in the manner of Polycran, a multiple-screen experimental cinema developed in Czechoslovakia some years ago. (*The Parasite*, like certain other cartoons, has what might be considered a didactic party-line plot: it can without much straining be interpreted to depict the downfall of capitalism.)

Not a new artist, but one who has come into new prominence at this past year's Annecy festival, is Vaclav Bedrich, who showed two films made in the past year, *Forty Grandfathers* and *The Last Shot*. The latter is a satire of the ever-popular classical Western; the former, more original in style and rather more charming, is based on a fairy-tale of an old man who, to his wife's great distress, is suddenly multiplied into 40 old men.

Zdenek Miler's *The Red Stain*, also shown at Annecy, repeats the sketching technique of his earlier *The Millionaire Who Stole the Sun*. Miler's films are rich in atmosphere, and his style, at least in his last two films, is unmistakable. He uses few in-betweens—that is, the movements of characters, growth of plants, etc., are large and abrupt rather than gradual. The static, pictorial quality of the individual drawings is thus emphasized rather than the motion from one to the next. Black and white with shades of gray are the main colors; but red is used for the flowers which grow up from the blood of the man killed protesting military build-up. (Like *The Millionaire*, *The Red Stain* is a film with a "message.") In *The Richest Sparrow*, made in 1961, Miler tells a children's fable teaching the dangers of greed.

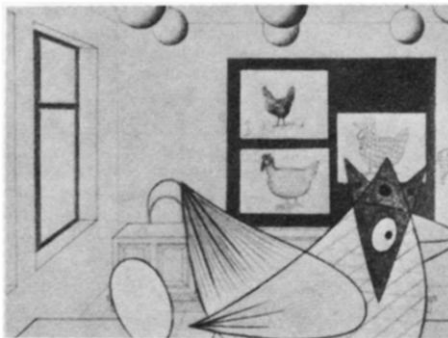
The Grand Prize at Annecy in 1963 went to Jiri



Lehky's *THE PARASITE*.

Brdecka for his film *Gallina Vogelbirdae* (which also showed in the San Francisco Festival this year). Brdecka started out just before the war as a newspaper cartoonist but turned to animation in 1946, writing the scenarios for *Springheeled Jack*, *The Angel's Coat*, *Dirigible and Love*, and *Bomb-Mania*, as well as for a few live-action films, and directing *Before Man Learned to Fly*, all before 1960. Since then he has made *Man Under Water*, again a serio-comic "history," using a combination of pure animation and animated engravings; *The Television Fan*, a children's film; *Attention!*, a film relating the history of weapons and armaments with an implied warning against war; *Reason and Emotion*, a rather long, ballet-like fantasy showing the struggle and eventual reconciliation between man's rational and his emotional tendencies; and *Gallina*. In all the three last-mentioned films, the artistic direction is by Zdenek Seydl, who has also worked with Pojar and Hofman. Seydl's figures are always highly elaborate and baroque; it is impossible to miss his touch, and the touch can sometimes be too heavy. *Reason and Emotion*, for example, suffers from Seydl's figure of the harlequin (representing Emotion), which seems to me overly formalized and stiff: the "emotion" which he represents consists too much of prancing

Brdecka's *GALLINA VOGELBIRDÆ*.



movements and rococo decor. Although the film won the first prize for short films at Mar de Plata in 1962, it has not been very popular.

In *Gallina* on the other hand, the touch of Seydl is less evident. The film concerns a little boy who, to his teacher's distress, draws a cubistic version of the class drawing assignment, a chicken. (This figure of the hen is the only part of the film that Seydl designed.) Our hero's hen, however, comes alive and becomes a rarity for ornithologists, while the conventionally drawn chicken of the teacher's pet, the hero's rival, remains statically on its piece of paper. The ideological aspect of the film—its defense of individualism and modernism—certainly played a part in the film's winning the Annecy prize.

At present, Brdecka, a vigorous, stocky man of around 40, is working on several projects, including co-directing (with Oldrich Lipsky) a live action parody of a Western. Entitled *Lemonade Joe*, the film will be in part a musical. In the musical number, Brdecka will insert animated backgrounds using a collage technique in nineteenth century "western" style. "Just filming a singer singing is static," says Brdecka. "The animation will give more movement to the film." *Lemonade Joe* is being filmed in black and white but will be colored in the laboratory—as was Zeman's *Baron Munchhausen*—in a stylized manner, with experiments in color juxtaposition.

Brdecka has not given up animation, and is currently at work on two cartoons, one a short film about harmful methods of dieting and the necessity of consulting a doctor before embarking on a diet, the other a lyrical piece based on medieval songs. This film will be called *Love* and will have two parts: the first, now in production, represents the happy side of love and is based on a Czech song. The second part, showing the tragic side of love, will be based on the French ballad, *Le Roi Renaud*. Brdecka confesses that he is a little tired of conventional animation. In *Love* he is using paintings instead—by a different painter for each half of the film. The paintings will not be, strictly speaking, animated; the movement will be in the photography and in the editing rather than in what is being photographed.

In the area of the puppet film, we find the Old Master, Jiri Trnka, currently doing book illustrations instead, for which he is almost as famous as for his films. Since *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Trnka has made only two films, both of them short—*Obsession* in 1961, and *Cybernetic Grandmother* in 1962. Because of the difficulty of sustaining interest in longer

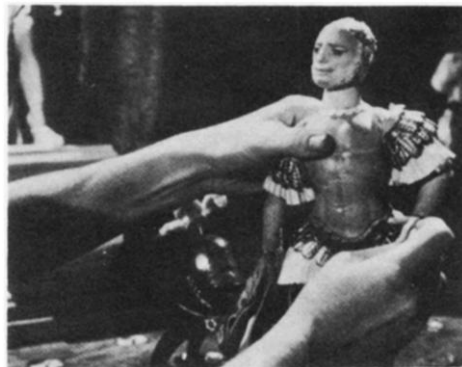
animated films, Trnka has decided to limit himself to films of a maximum length of 45 minutes. Trnka limits himself also to subjects in which he is able to exploit his already developed techniques and give his kind of puppets new opportunities for showing what they can do. One can observe a steady development in the films of Trnka; but it is not a development through experimentation: it is more like a straight path leading from *The Czech Year* to *Cybernetic Grandmother*, a development based on the expressive possibilities of the three-dimensional puppet. When he has no new ideas for this medium, Trnka prefers to work in other media and give puppets a rest.

His last two films, while dealing with modern subject-matter, retain his unmistakable touch. *Obsession* is a little film about a man who, from infancy, is infatuated with speed. Repeated sojourns in the hospital do not dissuade him from trying to outdistance everything else on the road; and finally even his soul goes speeding into the other world.

*Cybernetic Grandmother* is a more original film. In a rather long prologue, a little girl and her old peasant grandmother, both very appealing puppets, travel together and finally take their leave as the little girl steps into a bubble and is transported to another planet. There a second grandmother awaits her, but this one—the cybernetic grandmother—is a machine on wheels. She tries, by coaxing, wheedling, and scolding, to win the little girl's affection; but the little girl ends up back on earth with the familiarity of human emotions.

The film suffers from a superfluity of talk, but its highly effective backgrounds, depicting a world of the future both tempting and terrifying, and its modern musical accompaniment, as well as the charm of

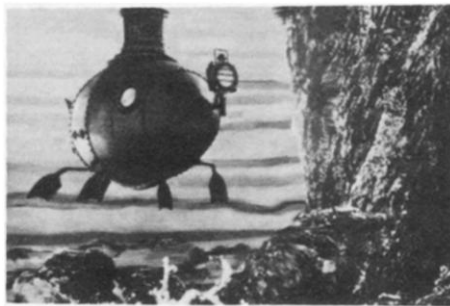
*The Theseus puppet from Trnka's A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.*



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the puppets themselves, make it one of the most interesting of Trnka's films. It is a satire of modern life, of hyperorganization, above all of the dehumanization of human relations. Trnka's approach is always, conservative, his theme always the value of the traditional ways of life, of old customs, of human affection. As André Martin writes in *Cahiers du Cinéma*: "(Trnka's) cartoons, his books and his puppet films do not attempt to overwhelm the attention of the spectators. They never try to surprise, irritate, force, dazzle, or impose an emotion, but on the contrary to comfort and relax the spirit."<sup>6</sup> A characteristic of Trnka's films, as opposed to Pojar's, is the slowness of their movement, the statuesque quality of the puppets and the "staticness" of their action. The climactic scenes are always static. In explanation of this, Trnka has stated: "... the very nature of cartoon [i.e., drawn] figures calls for continual motion: it is not possible to bring them into a state of contemplation. All this, of course, limits the creative possibilities of cartoons ..."<sup>7</sup> Still the question persists, especially among those accustomed only to Hollywood styles of animation (both UPA and Disney), what is the use of making puppet films? Why, after all, exert so much effort in making imitations of people imitate the actions of people? The answer, of course, is that the puppets are *not* meant to imitate people, nor are their actions made to imitate literally those of live actors. As in drawn animation, the movement of puppets is stylized movement, which can be exaggerated or curtailed to heighten or suppress various essentials (or non-essentials) of action. Nor are the plots of puppet films those used in live-action films (note, for instance, the embarrassment which usually accompanies productions of *Midsummer Night's Dream*). Trnka has said: "... Puppet films stand on their own feet only when they are outside the scope of live-action films—when the stylization of the scenery, the artificially heroic look of the human actors, and the lyrical content of the theme might easily produce an effect both unconvincing and ludicrous or even painful."<sup>8</sup>

The advantages which puppet animation has over drawn animation, and the reasons for which Trnka



Zeman's *DIABOLICAL INVENTION*.

seems to have abandoned the latter altogether, are several. First, puppet animation goes through fewer hands than drawn animation: there are never dozens of artists carrying through dozens of processes as there are in a drawing studio. The director thus has much more direct control. Second, drawn animation seems to lend itself primarily to caricature, while puppet animation is capable of either caricature or lyricism. And third, the three-dimensionality of puppets enables the director to use depth and light and to give his films a greater sense of physical space than that possible in drawn films.<sup>9</sup>

Karel Zeman, like Trnka, is the perfecter of a method, and is constantly in search of new themes through which to exploit it. Zeman's method is a combination of live action, animation, and puppets. He composes some scenes of three separate elements—puppets, photographed backgrounds, and live action. These are combined directly by the camera, much as the backgrounds and figures of normal animation are combined in the process of being photographed. For his interiors, Zeman often uses small drawn scenes which are placed near the camera so as to appear large. A small area or corner of the scene will be cut away, and through this the actual scene and the live actors will be photographed.

At the studios in Gottwaldov, Zeman is currently at work on a new film, provisionally entitled *The Two Musketeers*. Zeman calls it a "pseudo-historical" film. Its action takes place during the Thirty Years' War and its theme is antimilitaristic and antiheroic. The hero, a young man in search of home, love, and family, finds himself suddenly forced to be a soldier; in the middle of war he yearns for love.

*The Two Musketeers* is also being shot in black and white and will be colored later in the lab. Unlike the other films, however, the new film is not

<sup>6</sup>André Martin, "Pour qui sont ces Trnka?", *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Volume XVIII, no. 105, March 1960 p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>In the Czech periodical *Film*, Vol. VIII, no. 6, as quoted in John Halas and Roger Manvell, *The Technique of Film Animation*, pp. 264 and 273.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

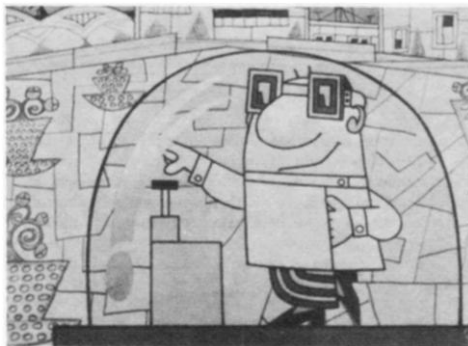


using drawings but rather photographs—photographs, however, of drawings. The inspiration comes from the engravings of an artist called Merian who lived during the time of the Thirty Years' War, wandering from place to place and making engravings of battle scenes. Greatly enlarged photographs of these drawings, as well as of old maps, are being used for the backgrounds of the film; yet the perspectives, Zeman points out, will be those of drawing, not of photography.

Another innovation in the current Zeman film is that no actual puppets are being used. Instead, Zeman is animating reduced-size photographs, which he prefers because of their more "real" quality.

While I was in Gottwaldov last summer, Zeman was just shooting an exterior on the hill above the studio. The camera was set on a platform, on which Zeman, his cameraman, and a couple of assistants, all in shirt-sleeves or shirtless, worked. A script-girl in a bikini sat below the platform. Dozens of children provided an audience, dividing their interest between the action and the few spare horses around the set. Erected on a rather flimsy scaffolding in front of the camera was an enlarged photograph of a drawing of a castle, with two wing-like projections (representing the sides of a road leading to the castle) coming out of its gates. The space between these projections was cut away, and in the grassy space left free, the actors on their horses and in their carriages galloped from a tent-studded distance towards the camera. The resulting scene will thus portray characters emerging from the castle gates and galloping down the road towards the cinema audience. This scene was shot several times, the actors bearing up well in the heat under their heavy costumes. No actual animation work was being done at the time, since the summer months are usually saved for exterior shots.

I was able to visit Bretislav Pojar's studio just before it closed down for vacations. Prague was steaming hot, and the staff were appropriately dressed in bathing suits. Pojar himself is a husky, young forty; the rest of the entourage are perhaps even younger. The staff includes, among others, Milena Novotna, who makes the puppets' costumes out of bits of fabric, leather, and whatever else comes to hand, often having to make a new costume when the original one gets dirty in the process of animation; Mr. and Mrs. Prochazka, who both do animation; Vladimir Malik, Josef Kluge; and two cats, whose function is to keep the mice down. (During the filming of *The Lion and the Song*, mice



Pojar's ATTENTION!

caused a problem by getting into the grain that was being used to represent the desert. Since that time, cats have been part of the staff.) The studio itself contains the comfortable clutter of work in progress. Nonobjective paintings hang on the walls, and a friendly, relaxed atmosphere prevails.

While I was there, the group was in the process of making a short commercial, and the backgrounds for *The Ideal*, a puppet film about a sort of Czech Babbitt and his changing ideals from childhood to maturity. Pojar has been very busy since his success with *The Lion and the Song* in 1959: in the same year he made *How to Furnish an Apartment*, in the next year three films, *Midnight Adventure* and the first two films in a series of three short films about cats: *A Cat's Word* and *The Artist and the Kittens*. In 1961 came the third in the series, *School for Cats*. These three films are combined forms with the mime Ladislav Fialka playing a live role, that of a kindly painter who adopts the mischievous kittens, which are represented by paper cut-outs. An amusing interplay is created between the artist and his paintings—

Pojar's ROMANCE.



largely done on a glass plate—and the messes the kittens make of the paintings. Pojar's last three films have been straight puppet films: *Billiards* and *The Orator* in 1962, and *Romance* in 1963.

As previously mentioned, Pojar began his work in puppet films with Trnka. Later, when he began to direct on his own, he had his puppets designed by Zdenek Seydl. But Seydl's own personality and style were so strong that Pojar's own ideas were submerged. In his recent films, therefore, Pojar has been designing his own puppets, allowing himself great freedom to experiment with various materials and techniques.

The standard type of puppet, which Pojar, like Trnka and other directors, has used in many of his films, is based on a wood body with ball-hinged joints. This body is covered with a rubber material, over which the clothes are put on. Often one puppet will have various heads to represent different facial expressions; or if only a slight change in expression is needed, the face will simply be repainted. These puppets are filmed standing erect on their bases, to which their feet are screwed.

A different type of puppet, invented by Jan Dudeska but developed by Pojar in his last several films, is the relief puppet. These puppets are flat in back and are laid on their backgrounds (instead of being stood up against them) or on glass. To keep the figures stable, lead weights are used as backing. The bodies are made of cork or plastic sponge. Heads as well as props, such as dishes, food, or small pieces of furniture, are made of an artificial substance called Modurit, a white clay-like material which is easily sculpted and then cooked for hardness. Unfortunately the Modurit lasts only about two months after cooking. Limbs are made of rubber-covered wire. Both heads and limbs are removable, being stuck to the main body piece with brads or pins. This movability makes the puppets highly flexible and expressive. In Pojar's finished films one notices the stylization of his method—for instance in the particularly effective opening of *Romance*, in which disembodied feet, arms, and legs appear, gradually "finding" each other to compose a person—but never is one aware of the fact that the puppets are not fully three-dimensional.

The process of animating puppets, both at Pojar's studio and at the others, is a painstaking one. Since twenty-four frames go to make up each second of finished film, a good day's work might be nine seconds of film. For each frame, every puppet in the scene, as well as any moving bit of prop or back-

ground, has to be separately and minutely moved. If in the rushes it becomes clear that some movement is not right, the whole sequence has to be done over from the beginning. In drawn animation, the process of re-shooting is facilitated by the use of animation sheets, which are an index to the positions of the figures at certain given points in the film. Puppet animation—especially when conventional puppets are used—being three-dimensional obviously makes the use of such two-dimensional indices impossible.

Where is the Czechoslovak school heading? We can observe certain clear tendencies, of which the major one is the trend towards mixed forms. The most notable exception in this trend is Jiri Trnka; but both Zeman and Pojar, as well as some of the lesser-known directors, are turning more and more to mixtures—animation and live action, drawn animation combined with puppets, and so forth. Pojar's series of cat films is a good example. Experimentation in general, as in Lehky's multi-screened *The Parasite*, is more in evidence than it is in the typical Hollywood cartoon.

As to themes and subjects, it is harder to generalize. A number of films, such as Miler's *The Red Stain* and Brdecka's *Attention!* have as their subject the dangers of war—but then so do recent cartoons from the United States, from Yugoslavia, and from West Germany. Much in evidence are didactic films, both for children and for adults—films stressing the value of cooperation, the evil of greed, and so forth. Periodically the government issues directives to filmmakers urging them to use more topical or political material. Yet one finds in Czechoslovakia as many films as anywhere else of a purely entertaining or purely artistic nature. Certainly most of Zeman's last films, as well as most of Pojar's and many of Brdecka's, are totally lacking in party or political overtones.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps indeed this helps account for the fact that Czech animation directors find themselves in a position as thankless as animators in the United States and elsewhere. Aside from Trnka, who was recently named a National Artist, the highest honor for any Czech artist, the directors of animation films are relatively unknown to the Czech public. Some years ago, a number of theaters presented, with good results, programs consisting solely of cartoons. But for some reason these programs were discontinued, and now, as before and as elsewhere in the world, the cartoons are shown only as "appetizers" to the main feature, and receive little if any notice on billboards or in newspaper reviews.



MOONTALE.

Yet Czech animation has "got something," a something which has won it a good deal of acclaim. Perhaps a large part of it is Czech humor, which differs markedly from American and British humor. Czech humor is often satirical; but when it is not satirical, it tends to be whimsical, even a bit sentimental. In Trnka's early puppet films, for example, we readily observe a kind of sentimentality, blended with a national pride which is more fond than fierce (Czech nationalism of course predates the Communist regime). His favorite figures, such as the old peasant grandmother in *Cybernetic Grandmother*, are all warm, simple, and earthy.

Sadism and cruelty are noticeably lacking in Czech humor. In Pojar's *Cat's Word*, the cat-mouse chase remains gentle: a cat may chase a mouse, but it is all a game, with neither figure showing any hostility towards the other. In the hands of Hollywood, the chase would have developed into the typical slam-

## ANIMATION

bang ruckus familiar to audiences brought up on "Tom and Jerry" cartoons.

Pojar's films are a typical example of the combination of satire and sentiment. Which brings up a vital difference between the Czech method of animation production and the Hollywood method. Pojar has at least collaborated on, if not completely written, all of his own screen-plays. In his last films he has also designed his own puppets, as previously mentioned. This degree of creative autonomy is hardly ever the case in American production, except in the films of independents such as John Hubley (who works out of New York). The scenario of the typical Hollywood cartoon is determined by a group of producers or studio executives and is generally out of the hands of the director, to say nothing of the head animator. In Czechoslovakia the relative autonomy of the director gives the films of each individual director a much more personal and distinguishable quality.

To return, however, to Czech humor: an even more basic quality is optimism—which we might expect, but do not often find, in American counterparts. The ending of Vystreil's *Place in the Sun* surprised me by showing that both men had learned the lesson of cooperation and were content to share their little disc of sunshine. I would have expected, as in an American film, that the ending would have come back round to the beginning, the two men again battling futilely.

Or is the optimism politically conditioned? It is difficult to say. One clear fact is that, whatever is responsible—the Czech artistic temperament, the organization of the industry, or other factors—Czechoslovakia has been and is producing some of the most interesting animated films of the present time.

<sup>10</sup>George Karnet states in an article on the Czech film industry (*East Europe*, Vol. 12, no. 5, May, 1963, p. 8) that the Czech film people work under a code "so strict and hairsplitting that their efforts are predestined to failure." In a later article (*East Europe*, Vol. 12, no. 9, September, 1963, p. 4) Karnet adds that rigid Party measures applied to films in 1959 brought the Czech cinema "close to an artistic standstill"; but that in 1962 V. Koucky, the Party official in charge of movie policy, was moved to another job and the grip was thus relaxed. I haven't seen enough Czech feature films to judge the veracity of Karnet's conclusions (though on the few I have seen, I differ with him both as to artistic merit and political content); but I can hardly find his conclusions applicable to the majority of the animated films I have seen. Trnka's films, for example, are apolitical in every respect. Thiel mentions (*Puppe und Zeichenfilm*, p. 18) that pressure was put on Trnka at one time to be more "conscious of contemporary themes," in answer to which Trnka made the *Schweik* film. In response to later pressures, Thiel says, Trnka simply stopped producing, with the effect that pressure was finally abandoned. The film following this letup, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is certainly anything but socialistic in conception: the puppets of the nobles have the most "character" and dignity, while the peasants are, as in Shakespeare, represented as likeable buffoons though the peasants have the fun, while the nobles are bored.